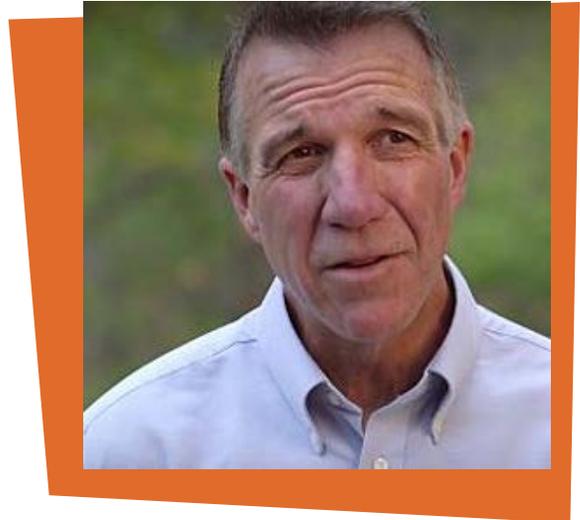


Phil Scott, Republican

Interview: July 27, 2016



1. Addressing Statewide Issues

Like many other states, Vermont faces many economic and social issues. We also know that 85% of Vermonters agree that arts and culture are vital to their community's life.

- Can you provide examples on how you would integrate the arts, culture, and creative community in solving social problems (or in enhancing opportunities for greater social or civic engagement)?
- How would you use the creative sector to drive economic development across the state?

Phil Scott: I see Vermont as being at the forefront of starting its economic revival, and I believe that we haven't spent enough time talking about that over the last number of years, about what we can do to help ourselves. I did this Vermont Everyday Jobs tour for the last five years, where I worked in the shoes of someone else in 35 jobs, everything from teaching second grade to beekeeping to making violins to doing all kinds of different things throughout Vermont, and finding out that we are very creative, and we do a lot of different things that I had never even envisioned.

That's the good news, that we have a variety of different interests. The bad news is that folks are struggling, that people that I was working with are working two and three jobs just to make ends meet, trying to pay their property taxes, trying to make their rent payments, their mortgage payments, and just surviving, and not being able to accomplish that. We have this stagnant population in Vermont, and we have this shifting demographic. We're getting older and we're not backfilling this age group from 25 to 45. We've lost 30,000 people out of that category alone in the last ten years since the last census.

What I'm driving at is that we need to rebuild that sector, and I believe that's through trying to attract the youth, trying to find ways for them to stay, to be able to afford to stay. Because I feel that we have this crisis of affordability here. But I think it all stems from this demographic challenge.

The arts, I think, plays into that quite well. We sell our quality of life and we talk about that quite a bit, but I think it can be better, and I think that certainly the arts, in terms of attracting all different types of diverse communities together, are important. I grew up in Barre, a blue-collar community, but rich in ethnic diversity and history, and all of it revolving around granite, and certainly the artistry all throughout Barre. I don't think that story gets told near enough.

There are examples of that throughout Vermont. I'm an outdoor enthusiast. I bike a tremendous amount, but the millstone trails up through the granite piles of Barre, they've carved sculptures into some of the granite that are really, really interesting. They bring people to the trails and then they see some art along the way, and what could be better than that?

Also, the Barre Opera House, the Paramount Theater... all examples of what we've done to try and be a community. I think we can expand upon what we've done in a lot of different ways and understand that a diverse Vermont is healthy.

2. Personal Connection

We've all had defining moments in our lives, where a cultural experience (a performance you have attended, or a work of art you have seen in person, etc.) has made a lasting impact on your personal or professional life.

- What personal experience with arts, culture, or creativity has had an impact on your life and your view of Vermont? How has that impact changed you?

Phil Scott: Well, again, they're varied in many different ways. I'll try and touch really quickly on that, but I think it's Barre, mostly, just growing up there and seeing the sculptures and seeing the beauty that we have, and watching the tourists' buses going through Hope Cemetery, not to honor or memorialize those who are laid to rest, but to see the incredible monuments that have been crafted right there in Barre. I went to school at what was then Spaulding Graded, across from what was then the Barre City Hospital, but now has turned into the Vermont History Center. Art has a way of reminding us about history. It's just a constant reminder and brings us through the steps, and I think that just a walk through Barre, or even Rutland as well is truly something amazing.

There were times when growing up — again I'm from a blue-collar community — that I just assumed that I didn't have an artistic bone in my body. That could be true in some respects, but we all have something to offer. I found out that I am a craftsman. I love to work with my hands, I love to create things, build things out of wood, fabricate things out of metal. That makes you an artist in a whole different way. It's just the way you view it.

It's just incredible what you can do. You use your basic skills to do that but you don't think of yourself as an artist. When I was at UVM, I took an art course because we were required, but I found out that I'm not bad at a literal type of drawing. I can do that, especially with pencils and shading and so forth. I enjoyed that.

I also took a jewelry class, which again, is about crafting metals and doing all kinds of things with metal and casting. It's just really interesting to me. Those are just a couple of examples, but I find going to some of the performances at the Barre Opera House, is inspiring, but going to New York and going to my first opera, "The Phantom of the Opera," was incredibly powerful to me. I look back at those experiences, even blue-collar or race-car-driving people like myself can appreciate the arts, and we do.

3. Arts Education and Programs for our Youth

Art instruction increases achievement across all academic disciplines and develops the whole child. We also know that 94% of Vermonters agree that the arts should be integrated into K-12 public school education.

- What will you do as Governor to champion arts education with our youth both in our schools and in our communities?
- How will you balance the importance of arts education with the push for primarily technical education (STEM)?

Phil Scott: I think they're integrated more than we accept or maybe envision. I, again, went to Spaulding. I did my college prep in the morning because I wanted to move on, but I also was involved in the vocational tech program. I took two years of machine trades, and learned an incredible amount of precision. It's artistry with machines, creating and building things. We have that throughout Vermont. You'll find that the masters, the real machinists, craft incredible things here in Vermont that we can be proud of.

I've looked back at how I started getting more involved in some of the woodworking and electrical and some of the crafting of metals and so forth. It was through industrial arts. I think that we need to go back to some basics, to tell you the truth. More basic life skills, and trying to encourage, again that diverse type of education. It includes the arts. It includes industrial arts, as well. I think financial literacy should be encouraged as well. I think tapping into the creative mind, to explore what's possible is critical. Because in STEM, the science, technology, engineering, math — all of that — could be revolving around the arts as well. They're all interrelated, and we need to make sure that we are able to tap into that, to really drive that creativeness that's inside all of us in different ways, and expose that. You never know what it's going to bring to your future.

Again, we have some challenges here in Vermont, in terms of our property taxes and education and how we pay for what we need. I happen to believe there should be more competition in schools and I think that we need more interactive learning. I also believe that we should be sharing resources. I think there's a way of accomplishing it. Every school may have tapped into something it's very good at, and maybe a student in another community would like to go there. I think that there should be more school choice. Once a student find what excites them, what they want to do in the future and what they want to explore, then we should encourage them to do so and we should expose what we can do together. We shouldn't live in silos and shouldn't try to replicate everything, because we can't afford that.

4. The New Administration's Role in the Creative Community

The State allocates funding each year for the Vermont Arts Council, the Vermont Humanities Council, and others that serve Vermont's creative community. Some are concerned that the state's capacity to support the programs and activities that are vital to the community are insufficient.

- If you share this concern, please share your ideas on how you might address them. For example, what three revenue sources will you create or use to increase the state's financial investment in the creative community? What specific program priorities related to the creative community are you particularly interested in investing in?
- If you don't share this concern, please let us know what you believe is the path forward for the creative community. What specifically should the state be investing in to ensure the vitality of Vermont's creative sector?

Phil Scott: Well, I need to be honest. I think that we're in a bit of an affordability crisis in Vermont, and we're going to have to, for the short term, try to live within our means. I appreciate the fact that we want to leverage as many federal funds as we can. I know you receive money nationally, and it probably requires a match. We want to make sure that we can leverage all we can, so I want to protect that. But I think that we continue to try and do whatever we can to work together into this creative economy, because it's going to be all hands on deck.

I think we first have to recognize that we have an issue in the state, that we do have an affordability crisis. I do think we have a demographic problem. But it's solvable, if we could all agree that we have the challenge ahead. How do we pull together in the same direction in order to do it? It isn't about this versus that. It's more how do we do it together, because it will benefit all of us to recognize that a healthy economy, a vibrant economy, will lift elbows. We'll be able to succeed in ways that we can only imagine at this point. It's solvable, it's doable, but there's going to be a bit of ... Regardless of who becomes governor, there are significant fiscal issues that are going to be waiting at the doorstep.

Recognizing that, but also understanding that if we get this right, if we invest in the right areas and if we are able to pull in the same direction and focus on the economy, then I think in the long term, we'll be much better off. It'll be much healthier. We continue to invest in some of the cultural facilities grants and so forth; I would want to continue in that regard.

I think that's important to continue with and expand when we can, because I've seen the benefit of that throughout many different communities all across Vermont. It's one of those programs (that is applied equably) geographically, and it doesn't matter what your population is, either. It impacts everybody.

We did a forum the other night in Grafton, and I've only been through Grafton maybe once in my life, even though I've lived here all my life. What a beautiful community that is, and they had it in the church that just was restored, and it was absolutely gorgeous. Things of that nature, restoring what we have, gives us a little bit of a taste of the past and what the future could bring.

5. A Cultural Destination

While Vermont is characterized as a special place, many believe the state has yet to effectively leverage the strength of our arts, culture, and creative community as a means for branding and attracting residents, employees, and visitors.

- How would you utilize our state's cultural assets to make Vermont a place where people want to live, work, play, and visit?

Phil Scott: Leverage in every way I possibly can. I would take advantage of that all I could, because I think we do have a great story to tell but I don't think we're doing it in a constructive way. I don't think we're doing it with a common theme or message. I think that that's part of it. It's very difficult to market, and very expensive. Look at our campaigns for governor. Normal people would spend a million to two million dollars on a total campaign. You're marketing yourself, in Vermont, and most people you would think might know who you are. But after spending a couple of million dollars marketing yourself, you can still go to pockets of Vermont and find that people have no idea who you are, have never heard your name.

That, I think, highlights the challenge that we have with limited resources trying to attract others outside the state. We need to put a marketing plan together that is common to most, so that we can all develop maybe the same theme. Whether it's "innovative by nature," whether it's "one foot in the pasture one foot in the factory." I've heard some variations of these. If we can develop a common theme and then run with it, so we all are saying the same thing, and have maybe just a little bit of what we do attached to that, I think that that's something that could be beneficial in the future. We have to work together. We can't do it in silos.

6. Priorities

The start of a Governor's term often sets the administration's tone and priorities.

- When elected, what actions will you take in your first 100 days to provide support and resources to the creative community?

Phil Scott: Well, first of all, it's all about hiring your administration. I would really pay attention to who was secretary of different departments that have a structural mind, that have the ability to work with others to utilize a budget. To be creative themselves. And to understand that we really are all in this together. I hope to have a bit of a cultural change in state government.

I think that we should be treating our citizens better. I think our different bureaucracies, our different departments, our different agencies... and it's no fault of their own, but... I believe that it's just a leadership change at the top. To lead by example and to treat our businesses, treat our individuals better, and treat them as customers. And again to understand that I will focus on trying to make Vermont more affordable, and to focus like a laser on trying to restore and revitalize this economy in Vermont that I think is truly unique. We just haven't told the right story, we haven't focused on the right things, and I think that the future's bright if we play our cards right here.